



Coaching:

Key To Sustained High Performance

ISA Blog - by Stephanie Wood-Garnett, ISA President

We are finally coming to understand as educators, and as a nation, that effective, high-quality coaching is as essential to creating high-performing schools as it is to creating championship national sports teams. It is universally accepted that outstanding coaches are necessary for building, developing, and sustaining winning teams. While the importance of educational coaches is not yet universally accepted, they are in fact equally vital to creating, improving, and sustaining high performing schools.

Coaching is the cornerstone of the ISA Approach. The ISA coaching method effectively solves the dilemma of how to embed, individualize, and sustain professional development as part of the authentic work of school staff. It also de-isolates the profession and ensures that teachers and school leaders receive non-judgmental, non-evaluative guidance from a master educator. Coaching the ISA way capitalizes on the best professional development practices and draws on the most effective forms of coaching including, supporting whole school change; building staff capacity school wide; improving teacher classroom practice; creating and supporting high performing teams; and increasing leadership ability at all levels. Because every coach is grounded in ISA's mission, seven principles, and three overarching drivers, integrity of execution is possible in each coach's actions and decisions, even across disparate sites.

The work of ISA coaches is concentrated in four areas. The first is leadership development centered on setting and prioritizing goals and outcomes and designing, executing, and monitoring strategies to reach them. The second is content-area coaching for individual teachers and teacher teams in literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies. Content coaching includes co-creation of inquiry-based curriculum lessons and assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); modeling instructional strategies that promote high-order thinking; and conducting classroom observations and providing actionable feedback for teacher improvement. The third coaching area is grade-level and content-area teacher team coaching using ISA evidence-based protocols to assess student work; develop strategies to improve student performance; share effective teaching strategies; and integrate the CCSS across the curriculum. The fourth area on which ISA coaching is focused is distributed counseling. Coaches provide support in developing counselors' expertise and knowledge in Distributed Counseling activities such

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as peer mediation, restorative justice programs, case management protocols, and the development of an advisory curriculum. They also help counselors create and execute a 9th -12th grade comprehensive post-secondary information, access, and application program including college counseling for students and families. Additionally, counselors help teachers develop appropriate counseling strategies.

Because the ISA coaching approach is customized and contextual, it is essential that the right coach is matched with the right school. "If you don't have trust with teachers and administrators," said one ISA coach, "you cannot be effective." Coaches cannot have difficult conversations, rigorously observe teacher practice, or advise administrators on how to plan and implement more effectively and efficiently without having a productive, trusting relationship with the staff. I agree with Vince Lombardi, "Coaches who can outline plays on a blackboard are a dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their players and motivate." This is also true of ISA coaches. They are not just skilled technicians. They are knowledgeable experts who have successfully done the work of building effective schools. The ISA approach draws on each coach's own experience, expertise, and judgment as leaders in the field of secondary school reform. The coaches understand that it is ultimately the collective capacity of a committed team that transforms schools into rich, rigorous, nurturing centers of achievement for all students.

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— Coach Vince Lombardi

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